

EPISODE #013 (Transcript)

Charlie Sandlan (00:02):

Today, we go with part two of my conversation with master teacher, my mentor, the fashion forward and always stylish, Maggie Flanigan. So put the phone back in your pocket. Creating Behavior starts now.

Charlie Sandlan (00:29):

My fellow daydreamers, last Tuesday I had the pleasure of spending most of my day at the New Jersey DMV in Lodi, New Jersey. My New York license expired and we moved, so I had to get this shit taken care of. I tried once, I got there at 7:00 AM, they opened at 8:00 and there were already 300 people in line. The cop was like, "Listen, there's no way you're getting in today. You're going to have to get here around 4:00, 4:30 in the morning. I've got people camping out." That's what happens when you close government services for four months during a pandemic. Everybody and their fucking brother needs driver's license, they need permits, they need car registration. I get there at 4:30 in the morning and I didn't get to a counter until 2:00 in the afternoon. That was my Tuesday.

Charlie Sandlan (01:53):

But, I came prepared. I had my camping chair. I had an orange, an apple, some water and I had a book. And it's a book that I actually want to share with you, I think it's a must. I think it's one of the best books I have read on our culture, on race. It's a book called Caste. C-A-S-T-E, Caste and the subtitle is The Origins Of Our Discontents. It is by a winner of the Pulitzer Prize, Isabel Wilkerson, who also was a columnist for the New York times. It's gotten incredible reviews. And when I read a unbelievably stellar review in the New York times, I take it seriously. I got the book immediately and it's blowing my mind. In this book, her whole thesis, her whole spine of argument here is taking our country and

the whole idea of race, which is really separation of our humanity based on a physical appearance.

Charlie Sandlan (03:06):

And she puts it in context of the caste system, which really had its origins in India and it also was absolutely inserted and implemented in Nazi Germany. It was inspired by the Nazis from American government and I just want to read a little bit here to give you a sense of what she's talking about. "Caste is the granting or withholding of respect, status honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefit of the doubt and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy. Caste pushes back against an African American woman who, without humor or apology, takes a seat at the head of the table, speaking Russian. It prefers an Asian American man to put his technological expertise at the surface of the company, but not aspire to CEO. Yet, it sees as logical a 16 year old White teenager, serving as store manager over employees from the subordinate caste, three times his age. Caste is insidious and therefore, powerful, because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things."

Close book.

Charlie Sandlan (04:49):

The whole book is that insightful, I recommend it. Really, you should go out and you get it, you put it on your list and start working your way through it. It's an important book. That was my bit of advice for today. Before I turn it over to my continuing conversation with Maggie, I wanted to share with you a memory because in this talk, we get deeper into emotion and how to use it and how to work with it. It's a very important part of acting.

Charlie Sandlan (05:23):

It reminded me of my first year in grad school. We were in our second round scenes and second round scenes, you're dealing

with emotional preparation. You're learning how to emotionally prepare, connect deeply and then be able to come into a scene. I did this scene called, All Summer Long. Basically, I had to be devastated, heartbroken. I'm coming into the scene heartbroken. She was like, "Listen, you can barely open the door. You can barely walk in. You're so bereft". Like, "Okay." We'd been on the scene two, three classes now, we're on our feet. My partner, my classmate, Andrea Anders and I were working. I knock on the door, I come in and I'm about five lines in, she's like, "What did I tell you?" I said, "What do you mean?" She goes, "What did I tell you? Where are you with the top of the scene?" I said, "Heartbroken." She said, "But you're not, get the fuck back out." I was like, "Oh fuck, Jesus. Okay." I go back out and I'm like, "Okay, fuck. Let's figure something out here." And I try to prepare, I'm standing out there. I'm like, "Fucking get upset. God damn it." Trying to mandate it. Come back on. I'm not even three lines in. She's like, "You're not even alive. There's nothing going on and you get the fuck back out."

Charlie Sandlan (06:36):

And now, at this point, the whole class just senses disaster. This is where the class just takes a nose dive. Every sphincter in the entire room was tight and now I'm freaking out and I'm like, "Jesus, fuck. I have nothing." I'm out there again. I try to prepare, I come back on. She's like, "You're not alive. Get the fuck out." And now, she's screaming at me. And I'm like, "Who can work under these conditions?" Now, I don't know what to do. And I'm like, "Well, fuck it." You know what I did? I laid down on the ground. I went into the fetal position, I curled up into a little ball and I just started to hum. I don't know where it came from. I just started humming to myself. I just started touching sound and the act of touching sound and that vibration there just cracked me open. And I'm alive. I'm crying. The tears rushing down my face. I'm like, "Finally." I go, I knock on the door. I'm five seconds in. She's like, "You can't act in that condition. You're too emotional." She's like,

"You have to be able to be fully alive and then come into a scene and be able to listen and work and take off from the other person, get the fuck back out." I was like, "Okay." But then, at this point, I knew I was alive. I'm like, "Okay, woman. All right, I'll do that."

Charlie Sandlan (07:47):

I go back off, I take a deep breath, I knock on that door. And it was my first real true experience of understanding what it meant to be truly, freely improvisational, deeply alive, experiential and really blowing the lid off the conventionality of a scene. I'll just never forget this. She sat there, she looked at me, she turned to the rest of the class and she said, "Did you see that?" She said, "That's acting. You could put that on any stage in this country. And you could hear a pin drop." I will never fucking forget that, it was an incredible experience for me. And I owe it all to her, to her toughness, to her grit, to her refusal to let me get away with anything.

Charlie Sandlan (08:38):

Before we begin our interview here, just one order of business. I'm going to say this now, because I usually say it at the end. My thought is that most of you have jumped off by this point, but I'm using SpeakPipe on my website, <https://www.creatingbehaviorpodcast.com> Go to the website, hit the button, leave a comment. All you got to do is press that red button and you can leave me a voicemail, you can send me a message. Ask me a question, leave me a comment, something you're interested in me discussing. A question you have about acting, about art. I don't care. Provoke me in some way, but leave me a comment. I would really appreciate it. My fellow daydreamers, here we go. More of my conversation with Maggie Flanigan.

Charlie Sandlan (09:23):

I thought we'd get into some discussion about acting itself and your thoughts about craft and technique. First off, why Meisner? Why study that technique?

Maggie Flanigan (09:42):

Well, I think it's a very organic technique and it makes not logical sense the way in which one normally thinks of logic, but it makes intuitive sense for the actor. And it's clear, it's a clear technique. It starts from a beginning and develops over a year, in first year and the same thing in second year. But, second year is more difficult because you're talking about character directing. You're talking about script analysis in terms of, but not head script analysis, really learning to take a text and give yourself a character and work it out. Work out the cause and effect of the actions in a scene. Create how to give yourself an as if, or a particularization or from your imagination, which is from your imagination. But, how you work out the moment, the actions, so that they are inevitable in terms of the line of the scene. And if it's a good writer, it is evident. It is there in the text and you can intuit all of that, if you know how to do it.

Charlie Sandlan (11:12):

Yeah, but first you need fundamentals ingrained in you.

Maggie Flanigan (11:15):

Yes, that's what first year is.

Charlie Sandlan (11:18):

Talk to me about listening. How important is that?

Maggie Flanigan (11:21):

It's crucial. It's fundamental, because if you know how to really listen and it's not just listen as we normally think of. But it's, your ears need to be tuned up to the nuance of what the person is really saying to you and how they're saying it. That must really happen to you, then you're playing a character. You've got to create the character's point of view and how the character responds to what the other actor's giving to you. But in first year, it's crucial to learn how to listen the way in which an actor listens by taking it personally, really personally and that takes a while.

Charlie Sandlan (12:14):

Yeah, because you have to sensitize yourself. You have to unsocialize in a way, unwind all of the-

Maggie Flanigan (12:22):

And truthful-

Charlie Sandlan (12:23):

education that you've had. All the walls.

Maggie Flanigan (12:26):

Yes. That's right. Begin to evaporate. They're not taking away all your defenses. It's a way of hearing that we don't necessarily hear that way in life. Although you can, if it's a very sensitive person, they're responding to subtext.

Charlie Sandlan (12:45):

Yeah, subtext. What's that mean?

Maggie Flanigan (12:48):

What the other person is really saying to you. What they're saying to you. And in the beginning, it's literal. You could say, "Hi." Or, "I love you." But that's not what they're saying, it could be the exact opposite like, "Yeah, I love you. Right, you bet I love you." And that's not the literal meaning of what they're saying. You want to get to the real meaning, which could be the sarcasm, the anger. And then you need to take that personally and respond to it with the text. In second year, you work it all out, but we're not there yet. The text in first year, you work off what the other person's really saying to you and for how you feel. It's all about getting in contact with the subtext and then with what they're really saying, which is the same thing and taking it personally.

Charlie Sandlan (13:57):

And being spontaneous.

Maggie Flanigan (13:59):

Yes. Absolutely.

Charlie Sandlan (13:59):

How important is spontaneity?

Maggie Flanigan (14:00):

It cannot be learned. That's the value of the repetition. Many people saying they've never done Meisner, they hate Meisner because it's all about repetition. I was talking to someone recently

and they were asking me about Meisner. And I said, "Yes, I trained as an actress in the Meisner technique. And I taught..." And he goes, "Oh God, it's that repetition." And I said, "No, the repetition is a tool in the very beginning of Meisner. And after that it's development into subtext and how you feel and truly responding in the moment, personally."

Charlie Sandlan (14:48):

I think it's great, because it gets you out of your head.

Maggie Flanigan (14:50):

Yes, it does. You can't act from your head. You can work out a text. Even that, you've got to work out from your heart and soul.

Charlie Sandlan (14:59):

It teaches you how to be present. How to be present, how to be in the moment.

Maggie Flanigan (15:03):

Yes. Open. Open and available. And that's taught in first year. If you're not open, if you're not available, then you cannot take in what the other person is saying and giving to you. It'll be a dead exercise. In second year, it's subtext. In first year, it's subtext. And by the time you go to second year, you are knee jerk with subtext. It automatically happens because you've been doing the exercise for a year.

Charlie Sandlan (15:37):

How important is crafting as an actor? Can you talk about that?

Because you learn how to craft in first year and most actors don't know how to craft.

Maggie Flanigan (15:48):

Yes. From second year it's much more difficult. First year is freedom and learning how to craft as an actor, learning how to take things personally. And learning how to improvise, meaning that a good exercise can go all over the place, not physically, but personally. So that in the end of first year, you have everything you need to do a straight part. Second year is character work.

Charlie Sandlan (16:19):

Most actors don't know how to craft. I think that one of the great things about Meisner's is, it teaches you how to craft in a simple, specific and personal way.

Maggie Flanigan (16:29):

Yes, it does.

Charlie Sandlan (16:31):

I don't know what your thoughts are on the difference between actors who are general and actors who are specific and what that difference means in terms of behavior.

Maggie Flanigan (16:50):

Well, if you're general, then you're going to have general behavior. You learn in first year what it means to really listen and really answer. And many people think that they do that in life, in fact they don't. They may hear there's some kind of insult coming, but they just don't know why their nose is out of joint. But an actor must be very attuned to everything, open and attuned to the other person, to the environment, always taking it in and always working personally.

Charlie Sandlan (17:29):

If you think you're a serious actor, what should that mean to you? What does it mean to you to consider yourself a serious actor?

Maggie Flanigan (17:42):

Well, to be a serious actor, you have to work on yourself and you've got to develop a very organic technique that allows you to really be free in an exercise and to learn to craft well. To really nail down choices, very specifically. But with Meisner, you work it out in second year, but then you must have the freedom that you had in first year to live it out fully, rather than being intimidating by the text. If you don't have first year, you don't know what the freedom is. Although, there other techniques that free you.

Charlie Sandlan (18:32):

How would you describe and define artistry?

Maggie Flanigan (18:36):

Well, it's one thing to be trained as an actor. It's another thing to have artistry. Artistry really is the how. How you approach the character, how you approach the material. It's not ever half-assed, it is always being open, available. And the artistry has to do with how, as I said, how you approach it and how you work on it.

Charlie Sandlan (19:19):

Attention to detail.

Maggie Flanigan (19:20):

What?

Charlie Sandlan (19:20):

Attention to detail.

Maggie Flanigan (19:20):

Attention to detail. Attention to the craft. But some people don't have artistry, some actors do have artistry. Artistry is with the care of how you approach things, not just half-assed. Approach with great sensitivity, great openness. And if you have a craft, then the craft supports you in your artistry. But if you don't have a craft, you can be very artistic, you can have what you think is artistry, but you don't have a form that's going to hold it.

Charlie Sandlan (20:04):

And that's the case for any art form.

Maggie Flanigan (20:06):

Yes, I think it is.

Charlie Sandlan (20:08):

The craft and technique. But it's actors that don't necessarily think that there's craft involved. Most actors don't study.

Maggie Flanigan (20:14):

A lot of actors study.

Charlie Sandlan (20:14):

You can type up a resume and take your headshots and call yourself an actor.

Maggie Flanigan (20:20):

Right. When you interview, you try to weed out that. Unless you see a spark in them, something that's special and open, and then you might be able to work with them.

Charlie Sandlan (20:35):

What were you looking for when you were interviewing a prospective student?

Maggie Flanigan (20:39):

I was looking for connection, for contact. I was looking for openness and seriousness. I had trouble with bullshit. I would not take somebody who was defended, thinking they know everything or somebody who says, "Well, I just want to be a star" or "I just need to get some parts and it'll come together."

Charlie Sandlan (21:06):

Why did that rub you the wrong way?

Maggie Flanigan (21:06):

Because that's not true. You can be very talented and there are some actors who are so gifted they will find their way into acting, maybe not studying, but that's not the case of most actors. You need to train to support your talent and you need artistry in terms of how you approach things, the care with which you approach crafting. The care, it's the care, not half-assed bullshit. Some actors think all I have to do is remember lines and anybody can do that.

Charlie Sandlan (21:50):

Acting is the ability to do truthfully. I know a lot of actors get caught up in emotion. I'm wondering if you could just talk about emotion and acting and its place in acting?

Maggie Flanigan (22:03):

Well, it's not a place where the actor vomits emotion. I don't know what other word other than to regurgitate the emotion. Many actors think that it is emotional, but if you're trained, you know that the doing, the action, will bring to the surface organically the emotion. If you've done your homework, if you've not done your homework, nothing much is going to happen. And that can cause

the actor to push, indicate, try to make it happen in front of the camera, or squeeze it. And that's not good in your head then.

Charlie Sandlan (22:52):

What's the best way to think about emotion when you act not to worry about it?

Maggie Flanigan (22:56):

Well, first of all, there are many places in many scenes and many plays where you must come in with emotion because you've just had something happen to you. You need emotionally, to be connected to the previous circumstance. And that is where you must have an emotional preparation coming into the scene. Many ways of getting it, the Meisner work does fantasy work, finding the personal fantasy that will bring the emotional life to the surface. And that fantasy is not observing it, it's living it out, living it out inside of you. And if you really live it out, you will at some point, come to life and you can't care how full it is. Even though you need to be very upset, it's clear in the text, you're very upset. You live it out truthfully, you get the emotion from a daydream.

Maggie Flanigan (24:05):

That's what Meisner is. It's a daydream. You don't have to go back to the past. The past will inform what has meaning for you, just because it's the past. How you were brought up may cause you to have issues like injustice and any fantasy about injustice will bring you to life. If you saw somebody maim an animal, you might get enraged, murderously enraged. Or if you saw your best friend was hurt physically by another person, that would bring you to life. Where you go to get it in the fantasy, it doesn't matter. It may have nothing to do with the circumstance. The value is the emotional life the daydream produces. And then you bring the emotion to the beginning of the scene, and then you work off the other actor, you begin responding to the actor and they can totally change you. You could come in feeling on top of the world and then the acting relationship, how they speak to you, may change

you emotionally and you must allow that to happen. Even if you think it's wrong for the scene.

Charlie Sandlan (25:35):

Yeah. That's a challenge. Because you do a lot of homework and then you've got to get there in the space and then you've got to improvise. Can you just talk about how an actor that does all that homework and then gets in there and lets it go and improvises.

Maggie Flanigan (25:54):

Well, it's not letting it go. You just don't bring the emotional preparation into the scene. You can't be doing acting exercises while you're in a scene. You can't stop and have your attention on a way of getting the emotional [inaudible 00:26:12]. That's not what Meisner teaches. That's in the homework, the homework on the text, the homework on the acting relationship, the homework of the given circumstance, where you go to get it. You can get it from a daydream, you can get it from music that has great meaning for you. But you don't go back to the past, but you can work with people that have meaning for you.

Charlie Sandlan (26:38):

Right. But then you have to let all that go though.

Maggie Flanigan (26:41):

When you walk on stage it's inside you. It's completely inside of you and you must not hold onto it. You leave it alone. And then your attention goes onto whatever you're doing, or responding and always responding to what the other actor is giving you under the imaginary circumstances. You can come in very upset and end up very angry, end up laughing so that it goes all over the place. Many times in the beginning, the actor's holding onto the emotion so that nothing can change them. In life, you continually changed internally. And that must happen when you're acting. And that's very hard for young actors-

Charlie Sandlan (27:33):

Most actors just do their homework.

Maggie Flanigan (27:33):

You want to hold on. I'm upset. I'm upset. This is great. This is great. And then you're not open to the effect of the other actor. It's what makes acting interesting is when you have surprising moments from the other person and you respond truthfully from yourself under the imagination, that's good acting.

Charlie Sandlan (27:57):

Most actors just come on and they do their homework at the other person. So there's no real experience happening-

Maggie Flanigan (28:02):

Then it's not good.

Charlie Sandlan (28:03):

On stage.

Maggie Flanigan (28:04):

Yeah, it's not good. If there's no experience between the two actors, then there's a problem in the acting. And you're not going to forget the circumstance. You don't have to stand there and go, "I got to remember they abandoned me for another woman or another man." It is, you already understand it in your heart. This scene or the exercise can go all over the place. It could come in that you're upset, the fact that he broke up with you and you could end up in his arms at the end of the scene, even though the text doesn't imply that.

Charlie Sandlan (28:44):

You're talking about not adjusting to text.

Maggie Flanigan (28:46):

Yes, not adjusting to the text.

Charlie Sandlan (28:47):

What does it mean to adjust to the text? And I think most actors do that, they try to say a line or fit their emotion to a line.

Maggie Flanigan (28:53):

To what's being said. But then, if you've done first year, that's taken care of in first year, which I guess is what you're talking about. You learn to improvise with the text. And what I mean is, you don't get to say what you want to say. The text is informed

completely by how you feel in the moment. And you've done homework on the acting relationship and the acting relationship is given circumstance, how you feel about what happened between you. How you feel about this person who did this to you. And then all you do is, you work off them. Meaning, you respond and go with the spontaneous response, not necessarily the text, it's subtext. You can say, "I love you and I hate you." You can start laughing where you've got a text that says I'm going to kill you.

Charlie Sandlan (29:57):

But most actors go, "Oh no, I can't laugh there. The line is, I'm so upset. I'm so angry. I want to slit your throat. I can't laugh there, that would be inappropriate."

Maggie Flanigan (30:06):

No. That's not inappropriate. You need the freedom to respond in first year for how you feel. And in second year, that is all worked out and it's lived through. You learn how to live through the line of the scene, live through the character line of the scene, working off the other actor. There's an emotional line of the scene that you kind of learn in first year, but the character may begin to change the emotional line of the scene from their point of view. You have to learn to work from the character point of view, which we have exercises to do that from.

Charlie Sandlan (30:58):

Well, that can bring me to this point. You've said there are two ways to wed yourself to a part, the empathetic connection and then doing what the character does. I'm just wondering if you could talk about that in terms of approaching a character?

Maggie Flanigan (31:14):

Well, if you're trained well and it doesn't necessarily have to be Meisner, it could be any way. Because there are wonderful actors who have not trained under Meisner or the technique. In terms of Meisner, you wed yourself to the part. It's the how, how do you do what you do? As I said earlier, there's an emotional line for the character through the scene and your straight response may not

capture all of it. You've got to work it out with particularizations, with as ifs, it's as if. So that as you're going through the scene, you see, Oh my God, that's a different response than what I would have. It's the character's response. How am I going to shift my response?

Maggie Flanigan (32:16):

Sort of like a train when the tracks go across another track to send you to another place, that's an as if that shifts the actor's response and what you're doing. And that needs to be organic. It can't be, uh oh, got to turn here. It can't be intellectual. You've given yourself a connection as if, it is as if this happened. And that's emotional as well as physical, as well as in terms with actions. And actors work out that the actions are the railroad tracks in scene work. That is the railroad tracks. They take you to a destination, particularizations are the roadblocks that sends you, oh, can't go there, I've got to go this way and comes from the other person or from the character that you're working with.

Charlie Sandlan (33:18):

What's it mean to find the empathetic connection-

Maggie Flanigan (33:22):

With the character?

Charlie Sandlan (33:23):

To the circumstance or to the issues, the relationship that's important?

Maggie Flanigan (33:28):

Yes. You must find the empathetic connection to the issues of the character, because they may not be your issues. You can't play a part where you just don't have a feeling for the part, but there may be certain aspects of the character that are not your own. And that's where another as if can come in there, can be an emotional as if, it can be an action, it's as if, particularization. But those tools can shift your response to the character's response, because it's the as if, that's how I understand it. But it has to produce the same behavior that the text in a general way requires.

Charlie Sandlan (34:29):

And you talk about and you train us really, to break down a script, to justify every moment internally. Why is that important? A lot of actors go, "Ah, you know, I like to just wing it. I like to just go and see what the moment offers me and you know, I've got my lines and I don't need to work anything out. I just see what happens."

Maggie Flanigan (34:56):

Well then, it'll be pretty much the straight response from the actor. But if you're working with wonderful text, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Stephen Adly Guirgis and John Patrick Shanley, Shakespeare.

Charlie Sandlan (35:15):

August Wilson, Shakespeare-

Maggie Flanigan (35:16):

Yes. They've put in a character, it's written in the text and your job is to catch the line of the scene, which is actions. I do this, which causes me to do this, which causes me to do this. She causes me to do this. And then you've got the tracks and they've got to be organic. It can't be in your head.

Charlie Sandlan (35:52):

But if I do all that homework, it stifles my spontaneity in the moment, it's it makes me heady.

Maggie Flanigan (35:57):

Well, they're in their head and they're not worked it out. If you've worked it out emotionally and you've worked out the actions, you've worked out the particularization, you've worked out the moment, that is your track. It's like a cup or a saucer. It is the foundation and your emotional life will run through what you've crafted. And it will be spontaneous because you've got to work out the moments. And if the moments are worked out, you will be spontaneous if you know how to do that.

Charlie Sandlan (36:38):

Yeah and most actors, they don't. They bring the part to themselves. You talk about this, you call them meat and potato

actors, actors that bring everything they do to their own pedestrian-

Maggie Flanigan (36:51):

Behavior.

Charlie Sandlan (36:51):

Behavior and their personality. Put them in 10 different things and it's the same.

Maggie Flanigan (36:55):

It's always the same. Well, the great writers write wonderful characters and-

Charlie Sandlan (37:05):

And the good actors can step into the shoes of another human being.

Maggie Flanigan (37:08):

That's right. But you've got to have real craft to do that so that you're living and breathing the part. And that's what good actors want. Even if they're not fully trained yet, that's the goal of putting yourself in the shoes of the character and living and breathing the part.

Charlie Sandlan (37:33):

Transformational acting.

Maggie Flanigan (37:34):

Yes. And the only way to do that, I guess if you're a genius and there are some actors-

Charlie Sandlan (37:43):

A savant. A prodigy.

Maggie Flanigan (37:44):

Yes, right. They may not have to do all of that, but for most actors you can't leave it up to your whim at the moment, because-

Charlie Sandlan (37:54):

No, I would not be banking my career on the fact that I'm a prodigy.

Maggie Flanigan (37:58):

Me either.

Charlie Sandlan (38:02):

Can you talk about the pinch and the ouch? The principle of acting, I don't do anything unless the other person makes me do it. And why that's so important and what that means and why it needs to be second nature in you?

Maggie Flanigan (38:12):

Yes. The pinch and the ouch in first year, it's pretty straight. The other person says something or does something to you and you respond from how you feel about what they just did. And it's always an adjustment to how they pinched you. You can't out louder than what they did to you.

Charlie Sandlan (38:37):

But what if you do, because a lot of actors do. They ouch louder than their pinch.

Maggie Flanigan (38:40):

They're working off the script then. They think that, well, now I've got to scream, but it's not organic. It's not coming from the other actor. A really organic actor can work off anything, even another bad actor.

Charlie Sandlan (38:55):

What do you say to an actor that goes, "I'm not getting anything from them. They're just not giving me anything."

Maggie Flanigan (39:00):

Well, you need to work out the meaning of what they're saying and that's how you get through that.

Charlie Sandlan (39:08):

Well, I just say, "Listen, you're not talking to a corpse." There's always something there. It might not be what you want or what you think it should be.

Maggie Flanigan (39:11):

Absolutely. If you've worked on your point of view as the character and you're working off what the other person is saying and doing, then you've built-in the character response. They may not affect you like they would if they were good, but you can always come

from an organic place in you. The pinch and ouch is very important. But you can have the pinch and ouch even if you're working with an actor who's untrained or is just giving you text and is rather dead. It's the implied meaning, if you're working like that, you've got to work out all the meanings. You got to work out how you feel about their lines, what they're doing, how you feel about what you're doing.

Charlie Sandlan (40:10):

Point of view. You're talking about point of view in moments, your point of view of what's being said to you. Can you talk about that point of view as an artist?

Maggie Flanigan (40:17):

That's right. Well, it's everything. If you don't have a point of view, the character's point of view, point of view is crucial. If you don't have a point of view as an artist, then I don't think you're good, because that comes from who you are. No one else will have your point of view. It is creative and original.

Charlie Sandlan (40:40):

It's one thing to have it. It's another thing to be able to express it. And certainly, when you get a group of new students, most of them don't know how to express their point of view.

Maggie Flanigan (40:48):

But that's okay, you teach them.

Charlie Sandlan (40:49):

That's right.

Maggie Flanigan (40:50):

I'm not going to fault them from that. You begin to teach them how you feel. That's the exercise, you go outside and you ask yourself intuitively how you feel about this. How do you feel about the sunflower? How do you feel about the dirt on the street? How do you feel about the guy that just walked down the street? Do you hear how they are talking to the other couple? How do you feel? And if you do that a lot, then you'll develop your point of view.

Charlie Sandlan (41:19):

It gets more sophisticated.

Maggie Flanigan (41:21):

It gets more sophisticated, but not sophisticated in the generic way we think of it is, a lady and a gentleman and everything. It's not how actors function. They function from their gut, their heart and their soul.

Charlie Sandlan (41:36):

But getting there takes a lot of courage. You have to be able to begin to start to stand up for yourself and that's not easy.

Maggie Flanigan (41:41):

Well, that's what the training's about. It's not easy to do that. That's why it's a year training. And that's what's one of the brilliance of Sandy Meisner's work. It covers, in one exercise, that develops and grows over an entire year that teaches the actor, how to come to life, to learn what to do when you're doing and when you're not doing it, how you feel, you learn how to work with real meaning. Real meaning to you because there is no character. And you learn how to bring yourself to life in an organic way and in an emotional preparation. You learn how to craft an independent activity, which is the beginning of character work. The open activity, the developed activity is a primitive version of character work.

Charlie Sandlan (42:39):

You talk a lot in class about needing to develop an inviolate sense of truth as an actor and actress, faith, this bullshit detector. Can you just talk about what that means to have an inviolate sense of truth as an actor?

Maggie Flanigan (42:57):

Well, it means one thing, which is when you're working as an actor and as you develop, you're not going to run around the world saying how you feel. You'll get punched in the nose.

Charlie Sandlan (43:16):

Fired from your job.

Maggie Flanigan (43:18):

Yes. But you need to develop an inviolate sense of truth. And that's the training, where you begin to respond truthfully for how you feel, not bullshit, not guarded, but really honest to God, how you feel in the contact. Same way with the independent activity, really crafting in the most truthful, organic way and the most meaningful way. And then when you're working in an exercise, both of them must be truthful in the activity. There can be no holes left in the crafting and you must have an inviolate sense of truth at crafting the independent activity, so you have a bullshit detector that goes off when you are crafting something that's not true.

Charlie Sandlan (44:16):

Yeah. That might be a little wacky or it's off.

Maggie Flanigan (44:16):

Right, there's nothing wrong with wacky, but it's got to be based in some kind of reality and in yourself and in the text.

Charlie Sandlan (44:27):

A lot of actors at least understand in some way what an objective is and what it means to have an objective. You want to have an objective, but you don't play the objective, but yet you've got to try to achieve something. There can be this confusion about what it means.

Maggie Flanigan (44:43):

Well, part of the problem is people think that the objective goes like that.

Charlie Sandlan (44:48):

Straight line.

Maggie Flanigan (44:49):

Straight line to the objective, but there many moments. There are many moments to get to that objective, and you may not get there. And the Meisner work teaches you that you must go moment to moment, not in your head, not in how you think it should go, but there's the moment. How do you feel about it? May have nothing to do with your objective, but you got to truthfully respond to it from your crafting, meaning that the crafting is

lodged inside of you. And if you're working from your point of view, not intellectually, but from your heart, the truth of you will begin to come to the surface. And if you've got the circumstance and the acting relation there in your heart, then you will begin organically to function in the moment from that.

Charlie Sandlan (45:44):

We just got bombarded by Wally and Dixie. Now we've got our dogs joining us.

Maggie Flanigan (45:51):

He wants to go out now, Dixie dog doesn't.

Charlie Sandlan (45:54):

No, Dixie is so cute.

Maggie Flanigan (45:56):

Yeah, she is, so is Wally.

Charlie Sandlan (45:58):

I know, they're boyfriend and girlfriend.

Maggie Flanigan (46:00):

They are.

Charlie Sandlan (46:00):

They're having the time of their life. We were talking about objective, you got to have one.

Maggie Flanigan (46:07):

Well, it's in the text, you've got to have one. But, you learn in first year that you don't play the objective, that it really is how you're treated, how you feel about the other person and what they're doing under the imaginary circumstances. It all happens under the imaginary circumstances, but how you get to the objective, you may not get to the objective, but must go for how you feel in the moment, given how the other person's treating you. Literally in the text, if you don't do that, then your text is going to be like a low ceiling. And your response is it going to hit up against, oh, I can't do that, oh, I can't do that because that's not what the text says. The text can act like a lower ceiling.

Charlie Sandlan (47:07):

Like superego, almost.

Maggie Flanigan (47:10):

Yes, a superego, who is the part of you that is the parental part.

No, you can't do that. You can't do that.

Charlie Sandlan (47:22):

And if you're working that way, then nothing surprising can happen. Nothing revelatory.

Maggie Flanigan (47:26):

Right. That's right.

Charlie Sandlan (47:29):

Because you're just going to do the cookie cutter cliché, shit that a hundred other actors are going to do when they audition for the part.

Maggie Flanigan (47:35):

And it's not what Meisner teaches. Actors must be spontaneous. And that's what you work on in first year, is the spontaneity.

Charlie Sandlan (47:45):

That's what's so hard because you have so much work that you have to do on the script, but then you have to be able to be free and spontaneous once you start working and not be weighted down by all of these things that you've done-

Maggie Flanigan (47:56):

Before. Well, that's why it must be rooted in you. If it's not rooted in you, you're going to get in your head. And by rooted, and maybe rooted is the wrong word-

Charlie Sandlan (48:07):

Well, embedded deeply.

Maggie Flanigan (48:08):

Yes. It's gotta be embedded in you by homework. Actor's homework, not just homework, it's got to be the actor's homework. Leaving themselves alone and living through the emotional and character line of a scene. And that must be worked out in actor's homework. And that takes a while to understand.

Charlie Sandlan (48:35):

A long time.

Maggie Flanigan (48:36):

Yes. You've got to work out the emotional line of the scene.

Because there are road tracks, a text is like train tracks and they can curve and go this way and that way. And in first year, it doesn't matter about the shape of the scene. You go with your impulses.

Charlie Sandlan (49:00):

Well, you have to be able to read a script and deduce the behavior that's written there.

Maggie Flanigan (49:01):

That's right. Yes. But how you get to the objective and once you've worked out the... First you work out the emotional line of the scene, then you work out the beats and then you've got to work out what causes you to go to the next beat, which is oftentimes emotional. How the other actors treating you, can be on the phone and something's said on the phone and that triggers, causes you to go into the next beat.

Charlie Sandlan (49:36):

Can you talk about what a beat is?

Maggie Flanigan (49:38):

A beat is a section of the text, which is about one thing. And then something happens, which takes you to another thing. And that must be organically worked out in the text. And then it has to be brought back to the other actor. And hopefully you can use what he's getting. And if they use what he's giving you, and if they're just giving you the text and not much behavior, then you've got to work out their moments and you must get it from them, even though they're not giving it to you.

Charlie Sandlan (50:17):

Well, that's what you have to do when you work with a reader in an audition-

Maggie Flanigan (50:19):

That's right, absolutely.

Charlie Sandlan (50:21):

Not giving you anything.

Maggie Flanigan (50:22):

And thank God he's not because it could be all bad. You can't work off a bad reader. It's implied in you, it rests in you.

Charlie Sandlan (50:33):

When you're talking about working out moments, we're talking about actions and-

Maggie Flanigan (50:38):

Right. Line intentions.

Charlie Sandlan (50:40):

Right. It's certainly the most difficult, I think, the most difficult thing for an actor to understand, it takes months. Most of second year is trying to get an actor to understand what actions are. Can you just talk about actions and what that has to do with creating behavior?

Maggie Flanigan (50:53):

Well, acting is doing what the character does under the imaginary circumstances. It's implied, but it doesn't mean you rigidly adhere to that. First, the actor has to catch the emotional line of the scene from the character's point of view. It's similar to what you do in first year scenes, except there is no character. And the reason you've got to make it second nature, because it is the character's response.

Charlie Sandlan (51:37):

Right. What are actions?

Maggie Flanigan (51:39):

Actions are doing. Meaning, what are you doing? Not physical, but it could be physical. A scene is written with cause and effect. I do this, which causes a response in the other person, which causes them to do something to me, which causes a response in me, which causes me to do an action that causes them a response. And that is how playwrights write, cause and effect. And the actor has to deduce the cause and effect. And for

themselves, work out the inner life of that character that supports them in doing the scene in each beat. And you've got to work out the trigger going into the second beat and that's emotional. It's like the change in music.

Charlie Sandlan (52:40):

And actions are universal behavior. We all do them, we've been doing them for thousands of years.

Maggie Flanigan (52:45):

Yeah. I guess it's unconscious or just, yeah, it's unconscious.

Charlie Sandlan (52:48):

They're not complicated.

Maggie Flanigan (52:49):

No. But in acting, if you're not doing an action, then you're not acting.

Charlie Sandlan (52:55):

Yeah. Can you talk about that actions and objectives and how they go together?

Maggie Flanigan (52:58):

Well, actions are there to achieve an objective. And then if you don't achieve it in the text, it's kind of like a emotion that happens and emotion could be tiny little meaning, that causes you to go into the next beat, because you didn't achieve or you did achieve what you wanted. So, you're talking about the actions and many objectives.

Charlie Sandlan (53:29):

And creating impulses. You have to create the impulses. What's that mean?

Maggie Flanigan (53:32):

To create an impulse?

Charlie Sandlan (53:33):

Yeah.

Maggie Flanigan (53:34):

Well, the actor, in order to go to the next beat, it has to be organic. And the other actor may not be giving you the meaning that would

cause you to go in there. Really, actors must work out all the moments and the emotional wave that causes you to go into the next beat. And sometimes the meaning is more meaningful than others. Sometimes it's just a little wave and then sometimes it's a big wave. And all of that, it must be able to live through by yourself at home, so it begins to be organic for yourself.

Charlie Sandlan (54:23):

Well, my fellow daydreamers, thank you for sticking around, keeping that phone in your pocket. We'll have more of my conversation with Maggie, part three, coming up in a few weeks. Please subscribe to the show, follow it. Wherever you get your podcasts, you can visit my website, <https://www.creatingbehaviorpodcast.com> You can leave me a voicemail through the website. You can follow me on IG @creatingbehavior You can follow the Maggie Flanigan studio @maggieflaniganstudio Lawrence Trailer, thank you for the music. My friends, get that book, Caste by Isabel Wilkerson. Be disruptive, [inaudible 00:55:04] with yourself when you can. Stay resilient and don't ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan, peace.